

## Informal Consultation Stage for Proposed Pastoral Reorganisation<sup>i</sup>

As deaneries across the diocese are working on pastoral reorganisation, this document is part of the ongoing sharing of learning. Consultation is vital, not only in terms of forming a good, contextually appropriate plan but if it appears that there has been a pre-determined solution, problems will arise later in this statutory process.

The suggestions of stages and considerations below should be read alongside the [Deanery Handbook](#), especially

- Appendix E: the guide to pastoral reorganisation
- Appendix B: DMPG Terms of Reference
- Section 4: Pastoral reorganisation and other significant deanery decisions

Consultation on proposed pastoral reorganisation is led by the DMPG (Deanery Mission and Pastoral Group), who have the responsibility of making any proposals around reorganisation to the Archdeaconry Mission and Pastoral Group (AMPG) following local consultation.

There is support available. Experience shows that it is best to access support and advice at an early stage in or to avoid wasting time and encountering problems later in the process.

- The Archdeacons offer overarching support as well as wisdom gleaned from the approaches of different deaneries.
- Peter Evans can give informal advice on pastoral reorganisation, including what the options might be and the relative merits of different options in the light of his experience.
- The Deanery and Parish Development Advisers offer facilitation of key meetings and events, suggestions on process and can share learning from other deaneries.
- Area and Lay Deans from other deaneries can be an excellent source of advice.

### Basic outline of stages and related considerations:

1. **Coming up with a draft proposal** for the future configuration of the deanery that will
  - Fit the mission of the deanery.
  - Include the reduction in stipendiary posts over the given period.

A pivotal question is who is going to come up with the proposal. The key players in terms of the deanery at this stage are:

- Area and Lay Dean/s
- DMPG, sometimes supplemented by extra people with particular skills or understanding to offer
- In some cases, Deanery Chapter

Some deaneries have worked on the basis of a fairly informal sounding out of the options, including with the Chapter; some have had DMPG Away Days to look at all the information and think and pray about options.

The 'right' approach is something that needs some discussion, and the Archdeacon needs to be part of that conversation to help avoid going down a route that might be problematic.

At this stage, the Deanery and Parish Development Adviser can offer facilitation of key meetings or events. They cannot suggest a proposal, that is for the deanery to do, but they can, for example, facilitate Seeking God's Way Together or another approach to enable a deanery to explore possibilities on the basis of God's call and contextual information.

## 2. Coming up with a consultation plan

It is very important to plan how you will consult as pastoral reorganisations are intrinsically about change and can trigger a wide range of emotions, even at a very early stage.

In some deaneries the planning has worked well when done with the Archdeacon, Area and Lay Dean, Deanery and Parish Development Adviser and, in some cases, the Deanery Accompanier, in the room. This mix of perspectives can help overlooking things and also offers mutual support. Some of the questions when considering consultation are:

- Is there a proposal that feels as if it's likely to work/be acceptable?
- Who has fed into that already? E.g. have the current incumbents fed their thinking in? Has the DMPG framed the plan or is behind it?
- What might be the reactions: Is the proposal something that will affect all/some benefices? Is it something that could be done in stages or once you start the ball rolling will it all have to be done? What are the most contentious suggestions?
- In the light of the above, what consultation is most helpful? E.g. in one deanery, the proposal was sent to the PCCs with some explanation of why it was being proposed, an invitation to a series of benefice meetings when it would be shared by the AD/LD, with additional agreed support present and an e-mail address for feedback and a deadline for feedback on the initial draft proposal and an opportunity to offer alternative solutions.

## 3. Local informal consultation

- Consultation meetings with a good (positive and forward looking but also recognising the reality) explanation of the wider context and of the proposal, followed by a chance to discuss in groups and then a plenary of feedback and reiteration of the e-mail address.
- Notes taken and shared afterwards.

## 4. Revising the proposal in the light of feedback

- Review feedback and amend the draft proposal in the light of the feedback.
- If at an early stage of the consultation, it becomes clear that the proposal is unlikely to work or be accepted (for good rather than selfish reasons) it is worth considering going back to the planning stage rather than simply trying to amend a flawed proposal – and transparency with that can build confidence as long as it doesn't look like caving to a few dominant voices. Holding the line against those sorts of loud voices is important but forcing through a flawed plan will never end well.

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<sup>i</sup> This document can be found on the [Deaneries Hub](#) section of the Bath and Wells website - January 2023